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THE SECURITY COUNCIL AND THE WEST BANK ISSUE

ANNCR: VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL'S DEBATE ON THE WEST BANK ISSUE:

VOICE: THE DEBATE IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL PROMISES TO BE UNIQUE IN ONE RESPECT. IT IS SCHEDULED TO BE THE FIRST TIME REPRESENTATIVES OF ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION HAVE BOTH PARTICIPATED IN A SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE, IT WOULD BE THE FIRST TIME THEY HAVE, LITERALLY, COME FACE-TO-FACE AT THE DIPLOMATIC TABLE. THIS IS CONSIDERED BY MANY OBSERVERS TO REPRESENT A CHANGE IN STRATEGY FOR ISRAEL, ALTHOUGH THE ISRAELIS DENY THIS. IN ANY EVENT, IT SUGGESTS THAT TWO CONCLUSIONS HAVE BEEN REACHED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER RABIN. FIRST, THAT THERE IS NO BENEFIT TO ISRAEL IN BOYCOTTING THE PROCEEDINGS AND APPEARING UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO ANSWER ACCUSATIONS BROUGHT AGAINST IT. AND SECOND, THAT THE WEST BANK TROUBLES WHICH BROUGHT ON THE DEBATE ARE CONSIDERED TO BE SERIOUS ENOUGH TO REQUIRE ISRAELI PARTICIPATION IN THE DEBATE.

IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO EXAGGERATE THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS DEVELOPMENT, AND TO CONCLUDE THAT IT SIGNALS THE BEGINNING OF A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE P.L.O. THERE IS NO REAL JUSTIFICATION FOR SUCH A CONCLUSION, AND THE ISRAELIS THEMSELVES HAVE BEEN AT SOME PAINS TO STATE THAT THIS MUST NOT BE REGARDED AS A PRECEDENT OR EVEN A HINT THAT THE P.L.O. IS TO BE RECOGNIZED AS A PARTY TO ANY FORM OF NEGOTIATIONS. NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE THOSE WHO SEE AT LEAST A LIMITED FORM OF PROGRESS. THE NEW YORK TIMES, FOR EXAMPLE, REMARKS THAT JOINT PARTICIPATION IN THE DEBATE WILL "AT LEAST OVERCOME ONE UNNECESSARY DIPLOMATIC HANGUP...AND CREATE THE POSSIBILITY OF OTHER DISCUSSIONS ON OTHER ISSUES."

CERTAINLY THE WEST BANK DEBATE ITSELF HAS BROADER IMPLICATIONS. STRICTLY SPEAKING, IT WAS TRIGGERED BY ARAB ANGER OVER AN ISRAELI COURT DECISION PERMITTING JEWISH WORSHIP ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT IN JERUSALEM, WHICH IS THE SITE OF MOSLEM SHRINES---A DECISION WHICH THE ISRAELI SUPREME COURT HAS SINCE OVERTURNED. BUT IT IS NOT HARD TO SEE, IN THE RIOTING, A DEEPER DISSATISFACTION---WITH THE NINE-YEAR OLD ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF THE WEST BANK AND EAST JERUSALEM, WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS ON THE WEST BANK, AND WITH THE EXPROPRIATION OF ARAB-OWNED LAND IN GALILEE, THE NEGEV DESERT, AND IN JERUSALEM ITSELF.

THE WEST BANK DEBATE, THEN, ACTUALLY GOES BACK TO THE DEEPER ISSUES UNDERLYING THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. AND IT UNDERLINES ONCE AGAIN THE NEED FOR CONSTRUCTIVE STEPS TOWARD A JUST AND LASTING SETTLEMENT OF THAT CONFLICT. NOT ALL U.N. DEBATES ON THE MIDDLE EAST HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE PROSPECTS FOR SUCH A SETTLEMENT. PERHAPS THIS ONE WILL.